From Promenade Planteée to the New York High Line

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Splendid vistas of Paris open spontaneously to anyone walking today atop the Promenade Planteée, which since 1998 has crossed the entire 12th arrondissement from La Place de la Bastille to the Bois de Vincennes at the eastern edge of the city. The old train bed was connected by the landscape architects Philippe Mathieu and Jacques Vergès into a high promenade, allowing a magical walk into the city.

For Paris, the restoration of their railroad has also restored the neighborhoods beneath it. What at first seemed a potential cost became both an asset and an organizer of wealth for an entire section of the city, and how raising money and taking advantage of private funds can make such a project feasible. And the Promenade Planteée also shows how New Yorkers can use the Parisian experience to improve the design of their promenade.

New York City’s High Line, now under construction, is the most ambitious version of the Promenade Planteée, being built to similar purposes under a different name. The High Line will be sited on the elevated railway tracks of the freight lake that crossed Manhattan. In 1934, New York City reconfigured the section of the High Line, seeing the idea of using linear parks with a new and innovative design. The idea was to transform an old railroad right of way into a new public park that would function as a linear park along the city’s old rail corridor.

The idea to convert the elevated railroad into a public park was first conceived in the 1960s by James Ennis, a Manhattan real estate developer. Ennis envisioned a new park that would be a linear park along the city’s old rail corridor. He believed that the park would be a new public amenity for the city that would attract new businesses and residents to the area.

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